

**LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 562**  
**Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius**

# **Antigone**

**Sophocles**

**Translated from the Greek by  
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**HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY  
GIRARD, KANSAS**

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## CHARACTERS

**Chorus of Theban elders**

**CREON:** Sovereign at Thebes

**HAEMON:** Son to Creon, in love with Antigone

**TEIRESIAS:** A blind seer

**GUARD:** In command at the burial ground

**MESSENGER:** A youth from the country

**ANTIGONE:** Daughter of the late King Oedipus

**ISMENE:** Sister to Antigone

**EURYDICE:** Wife to Creon

**Soldiers, maids in attendance upon Eurydice,**  
escort of Creon, citizens of Thebes

**Scene:** Before the palace of the Kings at  
Thebes

**Time:** Shortly before the Trojan War

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The division into acts and episodes follows the precedents established by the great performance of this play at the Second Theatre-Francais (Paris) in 1844.

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The Greek text employed in the translation is that of Wolff.

# ANTIGONE

## ACT I.

*The portico of the palace of Creon at Thebes is conspicuous in the back ground for the time is the break of day.*

*Well forward on the stage is seen the place for sacrifice, known technically as the thymele. It is in reality an altar-shaped platform in the middle of the space left free for dancing and similar exercises. On the thymele is built the altar of Bacchus, now adorned with wreaths and garlands.*

*The pillared portico of the palace in the background is reached by a double flight of steps at the sides. On the right of the portico is the altar of Apollo. Three doors afford entrance into the palace—one for the women at the right, one for the slaves at the left and one in the middle for the king. A gate on the extreme right of the garden affords access to the open country while a gate at the extreme left gives on Thebes.*

*At the beginning of the tragedy Antigone is discovered, a vase on her shoulder, beside the altar to Apollo. She rests the vase lightly upon the altar and, clasping her hands, looks woefully upon the image of the god.*

*Antigone is in the flush of a vigorous and beautiful young womanhood. Her robe clings loosely to her figure in white folds, leaving the arms bare. A purple cloak hangs from her right shoulder. Her sandals are threaded with gold.*

*After a moment of silent contemplation,*

*Antigone quits the scene by the gate on the extreme right only to return in a moment leading her sister by the hand. This sister, Ismene, is a delicate, timid girl, somewhat shrinking in manner and aspect. Ismene is dressed in white, and is somewhat muffled up as if she feared to be recognized.*

*Antigone.* Oh, my very own sister, Ismene dear, you surely know which of all the woes of Oedipus has not come to pass, is not fulfilled by Jove in the lives of the two of us! (*The sisters are the surviving children of Oedipus, late King of Thebes.*) Nothing painful or disgraceful or distressing or dishonoring that I have not seen in your woes and my own! And now what is this they also say throughout the whole city about a proclamation just issued by the commander of the troops? (*Creon thus referred to is not yet officially King.*) Have you heard anything of it? Or are the evils coming to our friends from our foes unknown to you yet?

*Ismene.* (*Her timid accents contrast with the bold tones of her sister.*) To me no word from friends, pleasant or painful, Antigone, has come since we were deprived of our two brothers dying on the same day each by the other's hand. (*The brothers thus referred to were also children of the late Oedipus. One of these brothers was Polynices and the other was Eteocles. After Oedipus had left Thebes, Eteocles and Polynices ruled by turns there. Disputes arose between the brothers. Polynices fled to the court of Adrastus who organized for him the famous expedition of the seven against Thebes. After much slaughter in the*

*attack upon the city, the brothers resolved to decide the issue by single combat. Each slew the other. The tragedy opens on the morning after, the foe having fled in a rout.) Since the forces of the Argives fled this very night I know nothing more whether it be of happy fortune or of grief.*

*Antigone.* I knew it well and for that reason I brought you outside the palace doors so that you might hear alone.

*Ismene.* What is it? You are revealing some deep plan.

*Antigone.* Has not Creon honored one of our brothers with a tomb and held one in dishonor unburied? Eteocles indeed, as they say, now treated with justice in obedience to the law, was hidden under the ground, honored with the dead below. But the dishonored dead body of Polynices—they say this has been heralded to the citizens—is not to be hidden in a tomb, not to be wept over. It is to be left unmourned, unburied, a sweet prize for the birds in the shape of a free gift of food when they see it. Such things they say the worthy Creon has heralded to you and to me—especially to me, I say—and he is coming here to proclaim these things effectively to those who do not know them. He does not deem the thing a trifling matter. Whoever offends in these details has death by stoning in store for him here in the city. Thus stand these things—such is the state of affairs for you and soon you will show whether you are trueborn or are but the degenerate child of noble sires.

*Ismene.* And what, oh, wretched girl, if these



things are so, could I do more either to bind or to loose?

*Antigone.* See whether you will aid with labor or by running risks.

*Ismene.* What kind of risk? What is your idea?

*Antigone.* Will you lift the body with this hand? (*Antigone touches Ismene's hand. Some versions suggest that Antigone raises her own hand significantly.*)

*Ismene.* Then you mean to bury him—a thing forbidden in the city?

*Antigone.* He is my brother and yours too even if you do not acknowledge it. (*Some versions make Antigone say here: "I shall at any rate bury my brother and yours, if you don't wish to."*) I will not be caught betraying him.

*Ismene.* Oh, reckless girl—for Creon has spoken against it!

*Antigone.* But he has no power to prevent me from serving my own.

*Ismene.* Woe upon me! Think, oh sister, how our father died hated and disgraced when on account of misdeeds exposed by himself he tore out his two eyes with his own hand. Then his mother and his wife, two names for the same woman, ended her days disgracefully with a noosed rope. Then our two brothers by self slaughter on the same day, the unfortunates, worked the same doom for each other with deadly hands! And now we two left alone seek how we shall die too most wretchedly if, violating the law, we so defy the kingly might and order. It behooves us to bear in mind that we are women and that it is not for us to war with men. Since we are governed by those

more powerful than ourselves we must heed these considerations, take these things into account and even things more humiliating. I therefore implore those who have power below to pardon me since I am under duress and will yield to those in authority. To go beyond this is to have no sense at all.

*Antigone.* Let me not command you. Even if you were yet to wish to do this thing with me you would not be satisfactory to me. Understand whatever seems good to you. I will bury him myself. I would gladly die for doing it. Dear to him, I will lie beside him who was dear to me, doing holy things in sacrilege. I shall have more time to please those below than those on earth for there I shall be forever. If it seems well to you, dishonor what the gods revere.

*Ismene.* I do no one dishonor. I was born incapable of violence against the city's laws.

*Antigone.* Let that be your excuse. I will go now to cover the grave of the brother so dear to me.

*Ismene.* Wretched girl—how I tremble for you!

*Antigone.* Fear not on my account. Look to your own fate.

*Ismene.* At least confide this scheme to nobody. Keep it to yourself and I will keep my own counsel.

*Antigone.* Oh, proclaim it! You will be far more hateful by your silence if you don't publish all this to everybody.

*Ismene.* You have a warm heart for a cold task.

*Antigone.* I know that I am doing my duty to those I ought to honor.

*Ismene* (as the dialogue attains its climax she has gradually laid aside her original timidity and is now talking in louder tones with flashing eyes). You will do it if you can but you talk of what you are helpless to do.

*Antigone.* When my strength gives out, I'll stop.

*Ismene.* One should not undertake the impossible.

*Antigone.* (She, too, is now fully aroused.) If you talk like that, I'll hate you and you will be justly hateful to the dead. Let me and my lack of wisdom suffer all this woe! I shall endure nothing so dire as an unlovely death.

*Ismene.* If it seems good to you, go! Know this, though you go foolishly, you are justly precious to those who love you. (*Ismene may mean: "You are really filled with love for your dear ones"—that is, the dead brother she means to bury.*)

*Antigone* now lifts the vase she had deposited on the altar of Apollo, places it on her head and quits the scene by way of the flight of steps on the right. *Ismene* returns within the palace by way of the door for women.

Fifteen or sixteen elderly gentlemen, belonging to the best families of Thebes, now make their appearance. They comprise what might be called the city council and are in special session. They group themselves in the available space left free at a little distance from the palace.

They comprise the so-called "chorus."

As this tragedy is performed in our theatres,

*in accordance with the religious grand opera theory of a Greek play, eight of the old men enter first by emerging around the "thymele" singing what is called a "strophe" and making a tour of the altar of Bacchus. Next eight (or seven) more of the aged gentlemen come upon the scene to sing what is called the "antistrophe." The whole fifteen or sixteen, each with a staff in his hand, then arrange themselves in a semi-circle and sing what is called the "ode" while they dance.*

*All this is in accordance with an idea in the mind of Doctor Dryasdust and the pedants of his type. It is a perversion of the spirit of the scene. What really happens is that the old gentlemen come in not all at once and not all saying the same thing and doing a song and dance together, but each making a remark and thus joining in the general discussion of the previous night's tremendous battle and the defeat of the foe. There is singing and there may be dancing for that was the Greek way of expressing sentiment. In order to convey an idea of what the elders really debated, each sentence begins a new paragraph. It is a discussion, not an ode, even if there was music in the air at the time and in the Athens of Pericles there was always music in the air.*

*Chorus. A ray of the sun—the most beautiful light of all that ever yet shone over seven-gated Thebes! (One of the elders indicates it with a gesture, for it is still but a little after sunrise.)*

*You are shining at last, oh, eye of golden day, appearing above Dirce's tides! (Dirce was the great Theban river.)*

The white-shielded fighter from Argos, coming in his armor with all the weapons, has been urged to swift rout in a wild rush away.

He was lured to our land by the wordy quarrel of Polynices — (*the speaker is interrupted by another*)—he flew over our land like a shrieking eagle spreading a snow white pinion (*an allusion to the Argive shields*)—

—with many weapons and with crests of horses' plumes.

(*There is a pause.*)

He halted by our homes.

He arrived encircling our seven gated roads with bloody spears.

He went before he filled his jaws with our flesh and blood (*or before our blood stained his cheek*) or Vulcan's torch could attain our lofty towers.

Such was the din of Mars behind his back, a dire thing to the foe of the dragon (*the allusion is a little obscure, but the dragon is evidently meant*).

(*A pause.*)

(*We must infer that some of the old gentlemen sang a patriotic song and a few of them may have danced to help pass away the time until the meeting was called to order. We may rest assured that, being Thebans, the old gentlemen did none of the preposterous and impossible things attributed to them by Doctor Dryasdust.*)

Jove loathes the boasts of a big mouth.

And seeing them coming on in a great tide, over-armed in rattling metal, he struck with a flash of flame him whom he saw rushing to shout victory from our walls.

Upon the hard earth he descended with his flashing bolt and then with maddened rush he breathed out fiery flames with blows. (*The text is obscure here.*)

Things took an unexpected turn.

Mighty Mars struck them one after another with the force of a race horse.

Seven leaders of their spearsmen at seven gates, equally matched, devoted to Jove their brazen spoils of battle, save only the two hateful ones who had one mother and one father and yet matched against each other their sure spears receiving the same death as the lot of both. (*The single combat of Polynices and Eteocles is referred to. These two brothers hated one another so much that, one legend says, their flames refused to mingle when the two corpses were burned on the same funeral pyre.*)

But great and famous Victory has come to rejoice with Thebes of the many cars.

Let us now be forgetful of battles and in the temples of the gods let us all dance the whole night together.

Let Bacchus, who dances everywhere in Thebes, lead us.

(*One of the elderly gentlemen announces a new arrival on the scene.*)

But here is the ruler of the country, Creon, the son of Menoeceus—(*he is interrupted by another*)

—he is the new sovereign by the recent turn of affairs divine.

What plan is he meditating? For he called this special meeting of the elders by public proclamation.

*Preceded by a guard of four warriors fully armed, Creon enters. He is a man of about fifty whose gray hair is conspicuous beneath his plumed helmet. His limbs are encased to the knees in armored boots and a breastplate covers him from the waist to the neck. As he stalks down from the central door of the palace, his troops emerge and pause while he proceeds towards the elders grouped well in front of the scene.*

Creon. Gentlemen, the affairs of the city, buffeted by many a sea of trouble, are again righted by the gods. I have sent for you to come here apart from everybody, knowing as I do that you were loyal to the authority and throne of Laius (*King of Thebes before Oedipus*). Moreover, when Oedipus ruled the city and later perished you stood by his children with favoring counsels. Since they now by a double doom perished on one day (*the brothers Polynices and Eteocles*) each struck by the other's fell hand, I hold here all power and authority through nearest relationship with the dead. There is no way of ascertaining the character and capacity and mentality of any man until he gains experience and shows it in administration and in the law. To me it seems that he who directing the whole administration of the city fails to seek the best advice but from timidity holds his tongue is the worst of ancient or of modern men. And he who prefers his friend above his country—I hold him as nothing. (*A slur on Antigone for holding her brother dearer than the city authority.*) I, in truth, would never remain silent if I beheld ruin stalking towards the city in

prejudice to its safety—of this be Jove my witness, who sees all things. Nor would I hold a person as a friend of mine who was hostile to the land, knowing as I do that our country is our salvation and that only while she goes forward in safety do we make real friends. (*The idea of a ship of state is implied here and Creon means that only when that ship sails serenely are its passengers safe.*) With such counsels, do I promote the welfare of the city. I have proclaimed accordingly to all the citizens what I decided regarding the sons of Oedipus. Eteocles—who died fighting for this city, excelling all in the spear—is to be placed within a tomb and to be blessed with all holy things appropriate to the best of men who go to the shades below. His brother—I mean Polynices—who sought to destroy his native land and his native gods by burning down their towers, who sought to ruin those of his own blood and lead them off as slaves, I have proclaimed to the whole body of citizens as one not to be placed within any tomb nor to be even mourned. Let him be unburied and may his body be a shameful sight for birds to devour and dogs as well. Those are my sentiments. Never with my consent shall the evil be honored above the good. He only who is a friend to this city shall be honored by me in his life as in his death.

*Chorus.* (*One of the Theban elders speaking for the rest.*) Since such is your wish, Creon, son of Menoeceus, regarding the enemy to this town and regarding its champion, very well. You have authority to do what you decide not only affecting the dead but as regards us who are still alive.



*Creon.* Look well to what has been decreed by proclamation.

*Chorus.* Let this responsibility be borne by the younger generation.

*Creon.* Sentinels are alert already beside the dead body.

*Chorus.* What else have you to command?

*Creon.* Have nothing to do with those who fail in obedience.

*Chorus.* There is no one so foolish as to seek death.

*Creon.* That is, indeed, the penalty. Yet many a time have men been destroyed by hopes of gain.

*The Guard enters with slow steps. He is a rural type of the sort known in the United States as a "village sport." He must not be deemed stupid but he has the ancient Greek duplex mind and in his vanity and his eagerness to show how clever he can be, he becomes something of a bore from overdoing his part. He is a stalwart youth, belonging to the forces of Creon but not enrolled in the army although he bears a sword. His dark tunic comes to the knees and a helmet surmounts his head but it is not crested, showing his humble rank as a sort of town constable.*

*Guard.* King, I will not say that I am come so quickly as to be breathless or that I used my feet lightly. I had many matters to reflect upon, making me turn around and around in the road as if I might go back again. My soul had many a thing to argue with me. "Wretch, where are you going to get punished?"—"Oh fool! Stop where you are."—"Yet if Creon learns of this from another

man, won't you suffer?" Meditating such things, I toiled slowly on, feeling heavy and thus a short path was made a long one. At last I prevailed with myself to come here to you. If I say not too much, yet I will at least say something. I have come in the expectation of one thing—I can have to endure only what is fated for me. (*The guard salutes with the humility born of a consciousness that he is a very superior talker.*)

*Creon.* What can it be that causes you such uneasiness?

*Guard.* I should like to talk first to you about myself. I did not do the thing. I did not see who did it. I should not be justly involved in difficulty for it all.

*Creon.* You build a fortification around yourself with skill and you fence the affair off well. You show that you have big news to tell.

*Guard.* Bad news certainly plunges one into hesitancy.

*Creon.* Won't you speak once for all and then go away as a relief from this ordeal?

*Guard.* Yet I will tell it to you. Someone has just buried the corpse and gone—having heaped dry dust over the skin and bones and done what else is meet.

*Creon.* (*He is agitated.*) What do you say? What man has dared do such a thing?

*Guard.* I don't know. There was neither blow of pick there nor clod from a spade. The earth about was firm and unbroken and showed no trace of wheels. It was a workman who is trackless. When the first sentinel of the morning showed it to us the wonder of all

was an unpleasant one, our amazement was painful too. He (*the dead*) was gone out of our sight, not entombed but thinly covered with earth as if by one who would evade the woe of leaving the dead unburied. No sign either of beast or of dog was there and the dead did not seem to have been lacerated. Evil words passed from one to another of us, sentinel challenging sentinel. It might have come to blows at last nor was anyone there to prevent it. Each of us might have been the doer of this thing and no one was found guilty. All repudiated it, denied knowing anything of it. We were ready to raise lumps of red hot metal in our hands (*a mode of taking oath to a thing*) and to go through fire, to vow to the gods that we had neither done it nor knew anything about the matter nor advised anyone who did. Finally, when nothing was to be searched out further, someone said something that caused us all to bow our heads in fear to the earth (*a gesture of propitiation*). We had nothing to say against him and yet we did not seem to be doing wisely if we acted on his suggestion. (*The original here is highly idiomatic.*) His advice was that this deed be reported to you and must by no means be hidden from you. This prevailed. Upon me, poor wretch, fell the lot of having to do this good thing. (*Or, winning the chance to seize the advantage afforded by doing it.*) I am here unwillingly and unwelcome, that I know. No one loves the messenger whose tidings are evil.

*Chorus.* Oh, king, to me it has seemed for some moments of meditation as if this deed might be inspired by the gods.

*Creon.* Stop speaking before you fill me with rage completely and are revealed as senseless as well as senile. You utter what is unendurable when you say that the gods have had consideration for this dead body. Did they glorify him as a benefactor when they hid him by burial who arrived here to set the temples aflame and their relics and their land and break their laws? Do you ever see the gods honoring the wicked? It is not so! Such things are said against me for a long time now by men who shake their heads in secret and bowed not their heads duly to the yoke of authority as those who love me do. I know perfectly well that from their number some have been led by lucre to do this. Nothing ever flourished among men so evil as money. This works havoc in the cities. It drives men from home. It bends and turns the honest mind of mortals to shameful things. It shows men how to do evil and to know every wicked work. All who were bribed into conniving at this have simply done what will effect their punishment at last. (*He turns from the elders of Thebes and talks to the guard who has been prinking himself preposterously and grinning at the confusion of the old men.*) Now as Jove is powerful and by my reverence for his might, understand this well, for I say it as a man under oath: if you don't find the very hand that did this burying and bring him into my sight, Hell itself will not be punishment enough for you before you are hanged up alive (*he turns to the elders as if to embrace them in one comprehensive gesture of fury*) to make this scandal public.

Thus may you know from what source gain is to be had rightly and for the future learn and understand that ye must not love profit from everything and anything. You will find that more men are cursed than are saved by shameless filchings.

*Creon pauses from sheer loss of breath in the vehemence of his fury. The old men cower in their corner. At last the Guard, evidently daunted, summons up a little courage. He has turned his back as if he meant to be off.*

*Guard.* Do you allow me to speak or being thus turned, am I to go?

*Creon.* Don't you know even now that your speech is offensive?

*Guard.* Does it bite your ears or your soul?

*Creon.* Why do you seek the source of my sorrow?

*Guard.* The doer of this thing offends your mind and I only your ears.

*Creon.* Ha! It is evident that you were begotten to beguile. (*Some versions have it: you are a born babbler.*)

*Guard.* Yet never the man to do this deed.

*Creon.* Yes—you'd even betray a soul for silver.

*Guard.* Alas—it's hard that to him the thing that seems should seem false!

*Creon.* Babble what seems to yourself. If you fail to have before me the doers of these deeds you will find that ill gotten gains work ill. (*He strides off with his escort.*)

*The old men of the chorus of Thebans seem to be excited by the going of Creon. They*

*make vain signals to indicate that he return. At last they retire to their customary station with many vehement gestures. The Guard, recovering from his consternation, finds a voice.*

*Guard. He'll certainly be found. (Vigorous shakings of the head among the Thebans.) But if he were caught or not, luck will decide that, you won't see me coming back here. (Distress among the Chorus.) Saved in spite of what I looked for, beyond my expectation indeed, I owe the gods much gratitude. (He hurries from the scene as if he were fearful of the old men of the Chorus, who seem bent upon holding him back. They rush together in a group and stare up the road leading to the open country. Loud voices are heard and the marching of feet.)*

## ACT II.

*The brightness of day now floods the palace at Thebes. The scene is the same but some two hours or more have elapsed. The old men of Thebes are discovered in a more composed frame of mind. They are talking together serenely. Music is heard. What they say must not be deemed an "ode" but a series of remarks, a conversation, among the members of the so-called Chorus.*

*Chorus. Many things are terrible, but nothing is more terrible than man.*

*He goes beyond the sea on the wintry wave through the drenching tides.*

*Immortal and unwearied Earth, that loftiest of divinities, he furrows year after year with*

the plows turning with the equine breed of young mules.

He leads captive the lightly swaying and lightly singing breed of birds and the race of wild beasts and the ocean brood out of the teeming sea he takes with strings twisted into nets—all-knowing man!

He holds in his snares the wild beast that roams the mountains, he subdues the hairy horse of uncombed neck with harness and he yokes the mountain bull. (*A correct translation is rendered difficult first by the state of the text and next by the theory that we have to do with an ode instead of a dialogue, set to music.*)

And discourse of speech, and ethereal meditation and the passion for local government by law has he learned——

—and to escape the dart of fierce frost in the open air as well as the pelting rain.

All inventive!

He confronts the future never at a loss regarding the issue. (*A highly idiomatic phrase in the original and very perplexing to Doctor Dryasdust. A word for word rendering might be: Resourceless regarding nothing he comes or goes to what things are to be.*)

From death alone he shall plot no refuge.

Yet he has contrived to escape from hopeless diseases.

Shrewd in contrivance, having arts beyond fathoming, he glides to evil now, or again to good.

When he stands by the laws of the land and

of the gods and abides by the justice he has sworn, high rises the city.

*(Music and the humming of some at intervals.)*

No city is his who associates with what is not worthy—such is the reward of his rashness.

Never may he be a guest at my hearth, never let him deem himself my associate, who does such deeds!

*An agitated movement is heard off the scene, accompanied by cries. The old men start up from their discourse and stare in the direction that leads to the open country. Some rural characters enter hastily, followed by the Guard, who has Antigone in custody. The old men forming the Chorus burst into exclamations.*

I see here a divine marvel!

How, seeing what I see, could I declare that this maiden is not Antigone!

*(She lifts up her head.)*

Oh, wretched child of a wretched father—Oedipus!

What is the matter?

Surely, it cannot be you!

You, led prisoner for breaking the sovereign's laws!

And taken in disgrace!

*Guard.* Here she is who did this deed. We caught her in the act of burial. But where is Creon? *(At that moment Creon emerges from the central door of the palace.)*

*Chorus.* Here he comes forth just when he is needed.

*Creon.* What is it? By what chance have I come out just at the right time?



*Guard.* King, mortals should not swear that anything is impossible. A reconsideration falsifies a sound judgment. I had sworn that it would be a long time before I came back here to face your threats by which I had been daunted already. But the joy that comes despite and beyond all expectation exceeds all other delight in magnitude. I come, although in the face of an oath sworn, leading this maiden who was caught honoring the burial place, adorning the tomb. No lots were cast to decide this time—this is pure luck for me. And now, oh King, take her yourself, if you wish, in hand and question her searchingly. It is but right that I go free of these difficulties.

*Creon.* You led her here—and in what way, then, did you take her?

*Guard.* She buried the man herself. Now you understand everything.

*Creon.* Do you understand and speak duly what you are saying?

*Guard.* I saw this girl burying the corpse you banned. Do I speak plainly and intelligibly?

*Creon.* And how was she detected and was she surrounded and seized?

*Guard.* The affair passed off like this. When we arrived, those dire menaces of yours still fresh, we scraped all the soil off the dead body, completely baring it. We sat on the tops of some mounds out of the breeze so that the odor from the fellow might not strike us who fled from it. Moving in lively fashion, man stirring man with insulting words lest he shirk this trouble, so much time elapsed that the

sun's flame was standing midway in the sky and the fire of it burned us. Then all at once a fierce wind raised a storm of dust, a pest in the air, and the plain was filled, withering all the leaves of the trees and even the open air was suffocating with it. We covered and bore the divine scourge. After a considerable time, all was changed. The maiden was then seen. She cried aloud the bitter notes of a bird's shrill utterance when it sees the nest bereft of a young brood. Thus was she when she saw the bare body. (*Pointing to Antigone, now hanging her head.*) She wailed with many a cry and invoked dire curses upon those who had done this work. With her hands she at once carried dried soil. From a wrought brass jug held high she sprinkled the corpse thrice with libations. Seeing this, we rushed pellmell and caught her at once, she not at all frightened. We accused her of having done before what she did then. She did not take her stand upon any denial whatever. It was both a pleasant and a painful thing to me, this. Nothing is so agreeable as to get out of trouble oneself but it is painful to get one's friends into trouble. But these things are all less important to myself than is my own escape from them.

*Creon.* And you—you, whose head is bowed to the ground—speak—do you deny these things?

*Antigone.* (*without raising her head.*) I acknowledge having done it all and I deny nothing.

*Creon* (*to the Guard*). You may take yourself off to wherever you like—freed of a grave

charge. (*To Antigone.*) And you, speak not roundabout but to the point—were you aware of the proclamations forbidding these acts?

*Antigone (In a low voice).* I knew of them. How was I to avoid it? It was made conspicuous.

*Creon (mastering his rage with an effort).* Then you dared to violate the laws?

*Antigone (she lifts her head and slowly rises to her full height and faces Creon).* It was not Jove himself who proclaimed these edicts to me nor did Justice, dwelling with the divinities below, frame such laws for men. Nor did I consider that your proclamations were of such force and effect as to supersede the unwritten and immovable edicts of the gods themselves, since you are mortal. These live not for today nor for yesterday but forever and no one knows whence they derive. Not for violation of these would I have to pay a penalty to the gods through fear of any man's judgment. I knew well that I must die. If I must die before my time, that too I call gain. He who lives, as I do, in the midst of many evils, will—how could he otherwise?—endure death as a blessing. Hence to me there is nothing in the least painful in this doom. But if I had left one born of my own mother to remain unburied in death, then would I suffer anguish. I am not in sorrows through all this. (*She makes a gesture embracing the scene.*) And if I seem to you now to have been caught in imbecilities, I have almost incurred the censure of an imbecile for that imbecility. (*She turns away from Creon with a show of scorn and mockery.*)

*Chorus.* It is manifest that the impetuous temperament of an impulsive father is that of the daughter. She does not know how to yield to adversities.

*Creon.* Yet understand plainly that stubborn wills are most surely felled and the hardest iron, tempered into durability by the heat, you may see most frequently snapped and broken short. By means of a tiny bit the hottest horses, as I know, are dominated. It does not behoove him who must serve his fellow mortal to think too largely of himself. (*He indicates Antigone who has walked off towards the palace steps and is regarding him with scornful looks.*) She was already accustomed to be haughty when she violated the plainest laws. Her insolence, once accomplished, became two-fold when she boasted of these things she had done and laughed at them. I would be no man, and she would be the man here if such power is to be wielded by her with impunity. Though she be my own sister's daughter or nearer by kin than all who kneel at our domestic altar of Jove (*the family chapel or altar of Jove was in the garden of a Greek home*) she and those of her blood shall not evade the worst of fates. For I hold the other one (*Ismene*) no less guilty in conspiring to effect this burial. (*He turns to the servants on the palace steps.*) Call her out! I saw her just now inside in hysterics, not in control of herself. The conscience of those who are devising evil is apt to be caught beforehand in the falsehood they devise! Yet when anyone is taken in an act of wickedness, I hate to see her try to glory in it!

*Antigone* (who stands scornfully regarding him). Do you want to do more than kill me, having caught me?

*Creon*. Not I, indeed. Having this, I have everything. (He indicates her with equal scorn.)

*Antigone*. What, then, do you intend to do? Just as to me your words are pleasing in nothing—and may they never please me!—so mine must likewise be no less displeasing to you. And from what source could glory be more glorious than that derived from the placing of a brother in the grave? All these people here (indicating the old men of the Chorus) would say they were pleased if fear did not tie their tongues. But sovereign power rejoices in many things besides the possibility of doing and saying what seems best to it.

*Creon*. You alone of the Thebans see this.

*Antigone*. Even they see it (She indicates the old men). On your account they hold their tongues.

*Creon*. And you are not ashamed to think you can do differently from them?

*Antigone*. There is nothing disgraceful in honoring one's own flesh and blood.

*Creon*. Was not he a brother who died on the other side?

*Antigone*. A brother by the same mother and the same father.

*Creon*. How, then, being irreverent to him, do you pay him honor?

*Antigone*. The dead body will not bear witness to such things. (She means that the dead will not find fault.)

*Creon.* But if you place him on a level with the godless?

*Antigone.* Not a slave, but a brother, died.

*Creon.* Ravaging this land! He stood forth in its defense. (*He means the other brother.*)

*Antigone.* Nevertheless, Hades<sup>o</sup> demands these laws be obeyed. (*She means that the gods below require the observance of the last rites to the dead.*)

*Creon.* But the good must not be treated on a level with the bad.

*Antigone.* Who knows but this may seem good down there?

*Creon.* An enemy, even when he dies, is no friend.

*Antigone.* I was not born to share in hate but in love.

*Creon.* Then going below, if you are to love, love them down there. I will never be swayed by a woman while I live.

*The door leading into the women's portion of the palace is thrown open and Ismene emerges in a swooning state. She is dishevelled, her long hair flowing about her form. She is supported by several female attendants. Her appearance causes fresh agitation among the old men of the chorus.*

*Chorus.* There before the doors is Ismene!

She lets fall the tears of a loving sister! (*The text is involved in unnecessary dispute owing to misconceptions of the real organization of a chorus in a Greek tragedy.*)

The cloud upon her brow is bloody—her face is ashamed—her lovely cheek is wet!

*Creon.* (*He is angered by the aspect of*

*Ismene.*) You, too, crouching at home like a spider stealthily sapping my strength—I did not know I was feeding a pair of accursed conspirators against my throne. Here! Tell me—do you admit being involved in this burial or do you declare you know nothing about it?

*Ismene.* I did the deed, even if she shared in it, and I was a participant and bear the guilt.

*Antigone.* But fairness does not justify you in this, since you did not want to do it and I did not let you play a part in it.

*Ismene.* But in your trials I am not ashamed to travel with you, having caused part of the woe myself. (*Some versions make Ismene say that she does not shrink from voyaging herself upon this tide of trials.*)

*Antigone.* Whose the work was Hades and those below record together. I love no friend who is a friend in words.

*Ismene.* Do you despise **me**, sister, by not letting me die with you and thus consecrating the dead.

*Antigone.* You shall not die together with me—and do not claim for yourself what you had no hand in. I am enough to die.

*Ismene.* What life would be dear to me, deprived of, you?

*Antigone.* Find favor with Creon—of that you must be judge. (*Or, as some translate, look to Creon—you are his kin.*)

*Ismene.* Why hurl these things at me—it does not help.

*Antigone.* I am the sufferer—if I rejoice at all it is on your account I rejoice.

*Ismene.* And how can I still help you in any other way?

*Antigone.* Look out for yourself. I do not envy you your escape.

*Ismene.* Oh, wretched girl—am I not involved in your fate?

*Antigone.* You at any rate have life left—I am to die, (*or, you chose life and I death*).

*Ismene.* But not because I left my words unspoken.

*Antigone.* To some you seem to speak well, to others I appeared the one who understood best.

*Ismene.* The guilt of this error is the same for both of us.

*Antigone.* Have courage! You will live. My soul has long been dead, since I had to serve the dead.

*Creon.* I declare, one of these girls seemed witless just now and the other has been so from her birth.

*Ismene.* The mind, oh king, of those who suffer evils, does not remain healthy as it was when it was first in bloom but loses its poise.

*Creon.* So it was with you when you preferred to do evil with the evil.

*Ismene.* What life was worth while to me when I was deprived of her?

*Creon.* Don't speak of her (*indicating Antigone*). She is no longer in being.

*Ismene.* But are you not killing the bride of your own son?

*Creon.* The furrows of other fields are arable. (*He can plow other fields*).

*Ismene.* Not as she was attached to him.



**Creon.** I hate vile women for my sons.

**Antigone.** Oh, dearest Haemon, how your father dishonors you!

**Creon.** You are an affliction—you and your love!

**Ismene.** And you will deprive your son of her?

**Creon.** It is Hades that impedes this marriage for me.

**Chorus.** It is decided, apparently, that this girl must die.

**Creon.** Both for you and for me. (*He speaks to the escort*). Wait no longer but take her inside, take them within, menials! Henceforth, these women must not be running loose in this style. Even the bravest take flight when they see Hades yawning for their lives. (*The attendants and the escort go off, escorting Antigone and Ismene*).

**Chorus.** Happy are they whose lot is not spiced with evil.

Those whose home has been shaken by the gods lack no curse creeping upon generation after generation, in fulfillment. (*A rather free version. The reader may regard these words as forming an "ode" if he likes but they are in reality the philosophical reflections of a lot of old gentlemen discussing the latest sensation in Thebes.*)

When a tide forced by raging winds on the deep dashes through the gloom in the bosom of the sea, how the waves lift their lofty crests and the black sand rolls upward from below while the beaten shores resound with the buffeting winds! (*A very discreet re-*

*mark of general tenor in view of the fact that Creon is there to hear it.)*

The ancient woes of the family of Labdacus (*the Theban dynastic line*) are piled high upon the griefs of the dying, I see.

One generation does not free the next for some god is always smiting them and there is no release for any.

Now, indeed, the last roots of the family tree of Oedipus are deprived of the light of life and are become as dust with the gods below—(*speaker interrupted, apparently, by the next*).

Such is senselessness in speech and fury of mind!

Who among men can withstand the power you wield, oh Jove?

Sleep, that leads us all in due time to old age, impotent sleep, has no power over you, oh Jove, and time can not touch you. (*The text is in dispute here*).

You are the sovereign to whom Time can not allot an old age and you are forever in the flashing brilliance of Olympus. (*As some gossip, others pray*).

What has been and what will be is ordained.

No bliss enters into the earthly lot of men without its curse as well.

Many-thrilled hope is a benefit to many men.

To many it is a false promise of light loves.

No man is experienced until he has thrust his foot into the hot fire.

Speech is made glorious by wisdom.

Yet there are times when the evil seems good—if some god be luring us into disaster.

There is very little time without its woe.

Here comes Haemon, the last born of your sons. (*As this is said, the Theban elders address Creon more directly.*)

He comes in distress on account of the doom of his future bride, Antigone, he is overwhelmed with anguish because of his blighted marriage.

*Haemon, now a vigorous youth approaching the age of twenty-eight, rushes upon the scene breathless. He is quite tall and his attire and his weapons denote a soldier. His aspect is that of a man worn out by loss of sleep. He gives a hurried look around and seems eager to speak but must pause for breath.*

**Creon.** Soon we shall know more than the seers. Oh, my son, have you not heard the fixed sentence of your intended bride since you come here raving against your father? Or am I still dear to you whatever I do?

**Haemon.** Father, I am yours. You having good principles, direct the ways in which I am to follow. No marriage shall be deemed by me preferable to being well guided by you.

**Creon.** Thus, indeed, my son, would you have your heart, esteeming everything subordinate to your father's judgment. On this account men pray that they may have good children growing up at home, so that they may be defended from the evils intended for them by foes and that the father's friend may be honored as the father is. He who begets useless offspring—what else shall be said of him than that he has made woes for himself and delight for his foes? So, my son, do not for the sake of a woman's pleasure discredit

your mind, knowing that such an embrace grows cold when a wicked woman is your mate at home. What plague is worse than an evil friend? Cast her from you as if she were loathsome to wed with someone in Hades. For since I caught her openly standing alone in defiance out of the entire town I will not prove myself false to the city, but will kill her. On this account let her invoke again and again a goddess akin to herself. If I will bring my family up as a source of disedification, then I must do precisely the same with strangers.

*Creon pauses as if he would hear what the others have to say. There is silence and he resumes.*

He who is a worthy man at home seems just to the whole city. He who goes to excess or who does violence to the laws or who thinks of over-awing the rulers is not going to gain my praise. But he whom the city appoints, him must we hear and heed in little things and great, in just cases and in unjust. Such a man I would venture to call competent to rule and to be worthy when subjected to authority too. Were he stood in the line of spearmen he would stand firm and straight and true. There is no worse evil than anarchy. That is the ruin of cities. It sets homes in rebellion. It breaks the allied line of spears. Obedience, submission to authority, saves the most bodies among the well drilled. (*This is an obscure illustration because it is borrowed from the military tactics of the ancient battle field.*) Thus must we become a bulwark to the well disposed and not be found inferior to any woman. It is better, if we must, to fall by

the blow of a man and not be rated as inferior to women.

*Chours.* To us, indeed, if we be not led astray by our own age, you seem to be saying sanely the things you have apparently pondered. (*That is, what you say, you say well, you seem to know what you are talking about.*)

*Haemon.* Father, the gods put minds into men, of all possessions the supreme one. I, however you may not wisely say these things, would not be able to controvert them with other words, although some other man might be able to do it well. I was born to look out for all that concerns you whatever anyone may say or do or censure. Your look is a dread thing to the man of the people and he reveals it in words that you would not like to hear. My part has been to listen to these things—some said privately—and I know what grief on this girl's account fills the city. They say she is the worthiest of women and that it is most wicked for her to have to die because she did what was glorious. She it was who when her own brother fell slaughtered unburied would not leave him to the mongrel curs to be devoured nor to birds of prey. Is she not worthy of the golden medal of honor? Such is the gossip that goes about in secret. To me, father, your well being is a boon. There is no possession more precious. What can be a brighter diadem for the children than a flourishing father or what for a father is more precious than his sons? Do not, then, have one manner for yourself alone, as if you were saying that you and nobody else could

be right. He who deems that he alone can think sanely and that in tongue or in soul he and nobody else has an advantage, he is seen when bared to be empty, when exposed to be nothing. For a man, even if he be a wise one, is not disgraced by having to learn many things and to yield much. You see how in the wintry streams many a tree gives way so that it may save its branches while those which withstand the force are utterly destroyed. Thus he too who keeps the mast of his vessel unyieldingly up, causes it to turn upside down and voyages under the seats for the rowers at last. So yield your anger and give way. If I who am younger may venture an opinion, I would declare that it were best for a man to be born wise than to have to acquire wisdom by experience. The balance does not always incline that way but still it is well to learn something from those who speak with wisdom. (*The speech is somewhat obscure because Haemon is trying to convince the old men in the chorus as well as his father without at the same time offending Creon.*)

*Chorus.* Oh, king, it would become you, if it be timely to say it, to learn from what he says. You, too, (*to Haemon*) might learn from him. Both sides have spoken well.

*Creon.* (*To the Chorus*) Are those of my age to be taught to think by a man of his age and experience?

*Haemon.* In what is unjust—by no means! If I am young, you should consider not my years but my capacity.

*Creon.* Is it our business to regard the reprobate?

*Haemon.* I would never bid anyone honor the evil.

*Creon.* Is she not smitten with this pest?

*Haemon.* The whole people of Thebes say no.

*Creon.* Is the whole city to order me and is it incumbent upon me to heed its orders?

*Haemon.* Do you not realize that what you say is spoken by a mere youth? It is he now (*indicating his father to the chorus*) who talks like a lad.

*Creon.* Am I to rule this land otherwise than on my own responsibility?

*Haemon.* But that is no city which is under the sway of one man.

*Creon.* Is not a city rated according to the ruler of it?

*Haemon.* You would be fortunate as the sole ruler of a desert isle.

*Creon.* (*To the Chorus*). He's fighting, it seems, with the woman.

*Haemon.* If you are that woman! I am anxious on your account.

*Creon.* Oh, vilest of men, going to do battle against your father!

*Haemon.* Do I not see you transgressing the laws of right?

*Creon.* Do I transgress when observing my own laws?

*Haemon.* You do not observe them when you disregard what is due to the gods.

*Creon.* Oh, base spirit, lower than a woman's!

*Haemon.* You will never catch me yielding to the base.

*Creon.* Yet your whole speech is for her sake.

*Haemon.* And for your sake and my own and for the sake of the gods below.

*Creon.* You'll never marry her while she lives!

*Haemon.* Then she must die and in dying destroy someone—else!

*Creon.* You go to an extreme of boldness in thus threatening.

*Haemon.* What threat is there in talking against empty judgments?

*Creon.* You'll regret your own judgments, for it is yours that are empty.

*Haemon.* If you were not my own father, I would say you were not in your right mind.

*Creon.* Being a woman's slave, don't trifle with me!

*Haemon.* You want to talk and yet listen to no speech in reply?

*Creon.* Really? But, no, by Olympus! you'll pay up for these taunts. (*To the escort*) Lead in that wretch so that in his sight she may die in the presence of the bridegroom!

*Haemon.* Not beside me—never think it!—shall she perish nor shall you ever again see my face. Rant henceforth among the friends who can put up with you! (*He rushes out by the road leading to the open country.*)

*Chorus.* Oh, king, the man has gone upon the impulse of his anger. A young mind when upset is dire in its impulses.

*Creon.* Let him do or plan more than man



can do. He shall not change the doom of those two girls.

*Chorus.* Do you intend to put them both to death?

*Creon.* Not the one who did not touch the body—you speak in season.

*Chorus.* And by what death will you slay her?

*Creon.* Leading her where mortal footstep has not yet trod, I will hide her yet alive in a rocky grotto with so much food as the rites of propitiation make fitting so that there need be no curse upon the city. And there, imploring Hades, the only god she reveres, (*Hades was a deity as well as a place and the dead were the great concern of Hades*) perhaps she will escape death, it will happen that she shall not die, perhaps, or else she will know however tardily that it is a waste of effort to revere Hades.

*Creon, accompanied by his escort, marches gloomily up the palace steps and retires within the main portal, paying no attention to the frenzied gestures of the old men of the chorus, who have some words to offer. There seems to be some agitation within the palace and the old men, exchanging looks, express the greatest agitation. Music is heard.*

### ACT III

*Before the palace of Creon at Thebes, groups of people have gathered, evidently in expectation of something to happen.*

*It is early afternoon of the same day.*

*The old gentlemen of Thebes who form the*

local council and who are always referred to in the text as Chorus, are grouped in their accustomed place. Now and then a group of the gathering people will pause to listen to the deliberations or the prayers or other proceedings of these Theban elders. Nevertheless, general interest centers in the palace itself, which has no sign of life beyond the pacing to and fro on the steps of some armed sentinels.

*Chorus.* Love is never worsted in battle. Love overwhelms all possessions and he spends his nights on the soft cheeks of virgins.

Thou (*the speaker is addressing Love as a deity*) thou dost wander over the wide sea and into the abodes of the rustics too.

Not even one among the immortals finds refuge from thee to say nothing of mere men.

He raves who has thee (*in his heart*).

Thou canst deflect the just mind itself into prejudice to its destruction.

Thou hast worked up this family quarrel.

Triumph is in the bright longing of the eyes of the bride finely arrayed.

The power of the mighty is in the sanctity of old laws.

The goddess of Love wins without battles.

(*The gathering crowd grows more agitated as signs of activity multiply about the palace portals.*)

(*One of the Theban elders announces an event.*)

Even I am excited beyond the limits of the law—seeing what I see.

(*The palace portal appropriated to the women is thrown open and Antigone, bound, is led*

*forth by the attendants. The surging crowd is held back by the sentinels.)*

I can not stop the flowing of my tears as I behold Antigone thus attended to the bridal bed of death that awaits us all.

*(Before descending the palace steps in custody, Antigone looks around her at the crowd. Her remarks are not necessarily addressed exclusively to the Theban elders although the things she says are for their benefit too.)*

Antigone. Citizens of my native land, look upon me as I go my last way, seeing my last of the light of the sun! Hades, the attendant of us all, leads me yet living to the banks of Acheron (*a river in the pagan hell*) not fated to be wed, for I shall not be celebrated in any marriage hymn, being already doomed to espousals below. I shall wed with Acheron.

Chorus. Then gloriously and with song you depart for the hidden places of the dead.

Neither by wasting illness are you stricken nor have you received the lot of the sword, but of your own free decision, living free and solitary, you will go down unique among mortals to your place in hell. (*The Hades or hell of the ancients was no such place of fire and brimstone as some modern theologians have described for the edification of Christians.*)

Antigone. I have heard that the Phrygian stranger perished miserably on the summits of Sipylus, she, the child of Tantalus. (*Niobe is referred to. She boasted of her many children, thus vexing the mother of Apollo and Diana, who had borne but those two. Niobe found her children all slain by Apollo and*

*Diana and she wept herself into a stone or into a fountain under a stone on Mount Sipylus.)* She was subdued like the pendent ivy over the budding stone. Now she wastes away into rain, according to the legends of men, and the snows never leave her while her bosom is wet with the tears falling from her grieving eyes. My destiny, most like hers, sings me to her sleep.

*Chorus.* But she was a goddess and goddess-born and we are mortals of an earthly breed. Yet is it high renown to have it said of a dying woman that she was on a level with the divine while she lived and even when she died.

*Antigone.* Oh—they make sport of me! (*This remark is not necessarily a reply to the last words from the Chorus but is Antigone's comment upon the deportment of some of the crowd.*) Gods of our fathers, why do you insult me thus before I am gone and out of sight, oh, my city, and ye men of money in my city! Oh, ye fountains of Dirce (*source of Theban waters*) and soil of many-charioted Thebes you will attest how I am stricken down unwept of friends and by what edicts I depart for the stony grotto in my new-cut tomb. Miserable girl that I am! Neither among men nor with the dead below have I any home—neither with the living nor with the dead shall I be!

*Chorus.* Rushing to the extreme of boldness, before the lofty throne of Justice herself, you have fallen far indeed, my child.

You are paying a penalty for a father's fault.

*Antigone.* You have freshened a sore wound,

my pity for my father and my grief for all the woes in the doom upon the glorious family of Labdacus. Oh, my mother's marriages! (*Jocasta, mother of Antigone, married a monarch who was slain unwittingly by his own son, whereupon that son — Oedipus — married his own mother — Jocasta — all the parties being unaware of their family relationship.*) Curses were upon her slumber—ill-fated mother!—by the side of her son, my father! From what doomed beings I took my birth! With them thus cursed I go now unwed to dwell. (*A pause.*) Oh, my unfortunate brother, wofully wed, you have destroyed me living with your dying! (*She means Polynices, who made a marriage that led to his expedition against Thebes.*)

*Chorus.* To respect is to be respected. (*They mean that if she had respected the law she would not be in this ignominy.*)

Authority, wherever authority itself is involved, will tolerate no usurpation.

Your own deliberate wilfulness ruined you.

(*Antigone has by this time been borne down the steps of the palace towards the gate leading into the open country. The discussion among the elders has been turned into a debate which is having a marked effect in keeping the crowd passive. Creon makes a quick entrance with his escort through the main door of the palace and stands looking down upon the scene from his station at the top of the flight of steps.*)

*Antigone.* Unmourned, friendless and unsung in bridal bloom, I am led along this way

prepared for me. No more will it be allowed me to see the holy eye of the flashing sun. My doom is a tearless one—no friend bewails me.

*Creon.* Rest assured that songs and wails before death would not cease for a moment were it any good to sound them. (*He addresses the custodians of Antigone whose progress is now impeded by the throng.*) Won't you get her away as quickly as possible? And when you have her well roofed into the tomb as I ordered you, leave her alone in it to decide whether she is to die or whether she is to go on living under the roof of such a grave. (*He addresses the crowd.*) As regards this girl, our hands are clean. She will be deprived of the companionship of those above ground.

*Antigone.* Oh, tomb, oh bridal bower, oh, everlasting cell within the bosom of the guarded rock, to you I go to join my own people, the great number of them among the dead as guests of Persephone (*Queen in Hades*)! The last of these am I and the worst by far to go down, perished by a dire doom before my time. Yet do I hold the hope that my coming will be welcome to my father and a delight to you, dear mother, and precious to yourself, oh dear brother mine! When you were dead, I, with this hand of mine adorned you for the tomb and poured out your libations. Now, oh Polynices, I pay this penalty for having honored your dead body!

(*Now comes a portion of Antigone's famous speech on her way to the tomb which has provoked one of the most vehement and most*

*voluminous controversies in the history of classical literature. Let the paragraph be read attentively first and comment will come next.)*

Even though I did you honor, to the well disposed this will seem proper. Had I been the mother of children or had a husband of mine been stretched out dead, never would I have assumed this task in defiance of the city's law. With reference to what law do I speak? (*Antigone is conscious of being carefully heeded as she speaks.*) Had my husband been dead, it would have been different. There might have been a child by another, had I lost the one. With father and mother both below in Hades, there could be no brother to be born for me ever again. In deference to that law, I placed you first, dear brother, and to Creon I seemed to sin and to dare wrongly. And now a prisoner in their hands, am I led seized helpless, unwed, receiving no share of the joy of marriage nor of the rearing of children but thus without friends, ill-fated, I wend my way alive to the tombs of the dead!

\* (*Some of the most eminent men in literature, including Goethe, have declared that this passage must be spurious. Sophocles could not have written it, they say, because it is inconsistent with the motive professed all along by Antigone. She has been hitherto glorified as a conscientious objector. Now we have her saying that had she been a wife and mother, things might have been different. Yet she said not so long before that she honored her brother's dead body because no human edict could supersede the code of heaven. Yet we*

must remember two things that explain whatever Antigone says here that seems at first blush inconsistent. She is appealing for sympathy to the people, well knowing that she has that sympathy but hoping that there may yet be a popular intervention in her favor. In the next place she is in love with Haemon, and the desolation of having to go to the tomb without even becoming his bride for an hour may excuse the weakness of her womanly mood. The dispute over this famous passage arises from that misconception of the function of the Chorus in Greek tragedy to which attention has been called already. Antigone is not pleading with the Chorus. She is pleading with the people of Thebes, addressing the crowd.)

What code of justice emanating from the gods have I violated? Why must I, the unfortunate, look to the gods any more? For what champions am I to call? Am I not called irreverent for my display of reverence? But if these men are the sinners, may they suffer no more woes than they have unjustly done to me. (*The agitation of the spectators grows so great that the elders of Thebes in session—the "Chorus"—say a word to quiet the crowd.*)

*Chorus.* Still the same furies dominate her in storms of soul,

*Creon.* Those who lead her captive shall yet grieve for their tardiness. (*Her guards urge her.*)

*Antigone.* Oh! That speech goes nearest to a sentence of death. (*The meaning is obscure unless Antigone is exclaiming to the crowd*



*that Creon has sealed her doom with his harsh words to her gaolers.)*

*Chorus.* I can not encourage you with the idea that you are not to endure such a fate. *(Some editors think Creon says this.)*

*Antigone* *(feeling herself urged along further.)* Oh, Theban fatherland and gods who begot our race! They lead me off and I am not to live! Behold me, ye rulers of Thebes! *(Antigone makes desperate gestures to the elders.)* The last left of your line of leaders—see what I suffer and at the hands of what men! I who worshipped what was worshipful! *(She is dragged off through the gate.)*

*Chorus.* Danae herself dared to exchange the light of heaven for brazen halls. *(Danae was the daughter of a king who feared she might have a child who would slay him. He locked her up in a chamber where she was visited by Jove in the form of a shower of golden rain.)*

Hidden in that tomb chamber, she was a prisoner.

Nevertheless, by birth she was renowned, oh my daughter and honored with the golden seed of Jove, flowing about her.

Dire is the night of doom and destiny!

Neither wealth nor war nor the strong tower nor the wave-beating black ships afford flight from it.

The son of Dryas, swift to anger, he, the king of the Edonians, was in bondage for his wrathful mockeries, for at the bidding of Bacchus he was immured in a stony cell. *(This was Lycurgus — not the great Spartan law*

*maker—who opposed the worship of Bacchus or Dionysos and was blinded by the power of Love and subjected to various ordeals.)*

Thus the dire frenzy was nipped in the bud.

In his frenzies he knew the god he affected with his mocking tongue.

He interfered with the inspired women and the divine fire and he enraged the flute-loving Muses.

Beside the dark blue clashing rocks in the tide of the twin seas are the shores of the Bosphorus and Salmydessus where the Thracians come. There Mars beheld the accursed wound which the wild wife of Phineus inflicted upon his two sons—the doom of darkness on those eyes that raved in their encircling glance ere she with gory fingers and her knitting needles tore them from their sockets. (*Cleopatra—not to be confused with the famous queen of Egypt—was the wife of Phineus, king of Salmydessus. He became infatuated with another woman who put Cleopatra into a rocky prison and gouged out the eyes of the sons of Phineus by Cleopatra.*) Other versions render these lines: Mars living near the town beheld a cursed blow—a blinding wound inflicted on the pair of the sons of Phineus by a relentless spouse—extinguishing their eyes that called for revenge by smiting the youths with bloody hands and the edge of the shuttles. (*The text is uncertain.*)

Wasting away, they lamented their woes, having a mother unwed, a birth unhonored by a marriage (*their mother being repudiated*).

Yet she, in her line of descent, attained the time-honored stem of the Erechtheidae. (*The mother of this luckless woman was a daughter of Erechtheus, glorious from the foundation of Athens.*)

In caverns afar she was reared among her father's tempests, a child of Boreas, the north wind, swift as a steed over the high hill, child of the gods in her erectness, stepping high.

Yet upon her, my child, the inevitable fates were hard.

*The members of the Chorus, thus apostrophizing Antigone as she is borne off down the highway, have their minds diverted by the entrance of Teiresias, a famous blind seer. The blind man is led by a boy. At sight of the blind man, Creon is visibly disconcerted.*

**Teiresias.** Theban lords, I come by the common road—two seeing with one pair of eyes. For the blind man his path must be made clear by means of a guide.

*Teiresias sighs from weariness and leans heavily upon his staff as with one hand he puts the heavy locks of hair away from his cheek.*

**Creon.** Old man Teiresias, what's new?

**Teiresias.** I will tell you and do you heed the seer.

**Creon.** I have never yet disregarded your judgment.

**Teiresias.** Thus did you guide the ship of state safely.

**Creon.** I know and can attest your services.

**Teiresias.** And rest assured that now again you stand on the edge of fortune's abyss (*or the fine edge of doom.*)

*Creon.* What's this? How I tremble at your words!

*Teiresias.* You'll learn when you hear the portents of my science. Sitting on my ancient seat of divination where every bird to me is a seeker of its haven I heard an unfamiliar note of feathered songsters, a crying in dreadful anguish and in clamorous chorus, unintelligible, barbarous. They were tearing one another in dire slaughter with their claws, I knew. The rush of wings was not meaningless to me. Fearful, I at once prepared a sacrifice on an altar all aflame. From the sacrifice, Vulcan shone with no flame (*an evil omen, for the fire was low*). A dew exhaled from the thighs and ran upon the ashes and gave forth clouds of vapor while the gall was scattered to the winds and the flesh of the thighs bared the encasing fat. Thus from this boy I found out the vainness of the auguries I sought, for he is a guide to me as I am to others. And the city is sick with these things through your sway. Our altars and all our sanctities in home and earth are cursed through the hounds and the birds that have sated themselves on the luckless corpse of the son of Oedipus. For this reason the divinities will not henceforth favor our entreaty and our offering or the fire of fleshly sacrifice. No bird emits an intelligible cry fed as all birds now are on the fatness of a dead man's slaughter. Consider these things, my son. To all men it is customary and common to fall into error. When he is in error, he is neither a foolish man nor an impoverished one when

he retrieves the evil into which he has fallen and shows himself amenable to argument. Obstinacy renders one liable to the imputation of dark ignorance. Now yield to the dead. Deal no blow to the defeated. What glory is there in any slaying of the dead? Wishing you well, I speak well. It is most agreeable to learn from him who is well spoken if he speaks to your advantage.

*Creon.* Oh, aged seer, all aim their shafts at this man (*strikes his breast*) as if they were archers trying at targets and to you I must also seem no man unversed in divination seeing that I have long been sold to seers and shipped off like goods in their trade. Profit! Make money! Drive bargains in the white gold of Sardis (*gold alloyed with silver*) and in Indian gold if you like. In the tomb, for all that, you shall not hide that fellow. Not even if the eagles of Jove were to snatch him up to the very throne of the deity will I, for fear of any such pollution by carrion, permit his burial. I know perfectly well that no man can bring pollution upon the gods. They fall—oh aged Teiresias, they among mortals who shape disgraceful suggestions with beautiful language for the sake of profit to themselves, fall with the direst of descents!

*Teiresias.* Did any man ever know or hear tell—?

*Creon.* What? What hackneyed thing are you saying?

*Teiresias.* How much the greatest of all possessions is wisdom!

*Creon.* Just as lack of foresight, it seems to me, is the worst of evils.

*Teiresias.* That is the very affliction with which you are cursed.

*Creon.* I do not deem it becoming to retort upon a seer uncivilly.

*Teiresias.* And yet you speak just so when you say I prophesy falsely.

*Creon.* Well, the breed of prophets was ever fond of money.

*Teiresias.* And the breed of kings loves a mean advantage.

*Creon.* You know you are speaking to your sovereign.

*Teiresias.* I know. Through me you hold this town securely.

*Creon.* You are a wise seer yet you love injustice.

*Teiresias.* You provoke me to speak from the depths of my soul, to reveal all!

*Creon.* Go on—only don't speak for the sake of your own gain.

*Teiresias.* I shall be considering your own advantage.

*Creon.* You shall not trade on my credulity. (*Or, my understanding is not to be trafficked in.*)

*Teiresias.* Now understand this well—not many more courses of the sun's chariot of day will you follow before you will see the child of your loins given in exchange, dead for dead, to death. You have despatched those above down below and set a soul dishonored in its living tomb while retaining here above one whose lot is with the divinities of the shades,

being a dead body, unburied, unsepulchred, un-honored. These doings are not for you nor for the gods above and yet you dare do violence yourself to them, for which the instruments of full revenge lurk in hell, the Furies (*the Erinyes, a sisterhood who slept in Hades until some wickedness aroused them to come up to earth and pursue the evil doer*) so that you may be caught in the working of your wickedness and damned for it. Such are the things I am impelled to tell you for what you call the love of gain. In no long time the lamentations of men and women will rouse your house. The city is torn by all manner of hatreds in those whose mutilated sons were polluted by dogs and wild beasts or by the winged bird bearing its unholy odor to the hearthstone of the slain. Such are the shafts which like a bowman I aimed at your heart, bearing their venom surely to their aim and from the sting of which you shall write. You, boy, lead me to my home again and let this man smite the young with his wrath and learn also to train his tongue into silence and to bear in his bosom a heart more swayed by reason than now he keeps there. (*Teiresias is led out quickly by the boy.*)

*Chorus.* That man, oh king, has gone prophesying dreadful things. Ever since I had locks of hair to shake around (*my cheek*) and turn white instead of black I know he has not foretold what was false to our city.

*Creon.* I know that also and my mind is uneasy. It is not well to give in. To hold out

and crush my soul with a curse is awful likewise.

*Chorus.* Oh, son of Menoeceus, you should take good advice!

*Creon.* Then what should I do? Speak! I will be advised.

*Chorus.* Go and bring the maiden up from the stony roof and build a tomb for the one lying exposed and prone.

*Creon.* That is your view—and I must yield?

*Chorus.* As quickly as possible, oh king! Quick retribution from the divinities hastens to catch up with the evil of those who plan mischief. (*Or, swift vengeance from the gods overtakes the evil in design.*)

*Creon.* Ah! I relent in my resolve to do this deed. Grim necessity is not to be resisted. (*Or, we must not war with necessity.*)

*Chorus.* Go now and do it—let it not be left to others.

*Creon.* I shall go just as I am. (*He turns to his suite.*) Go, comrades, every one, those here and those there (*inside*) with spears in your hands rush to the place which is in plain sight from here. I will myself, since my mind has been thus turned, seeing that I shut her up, I will be on hand to free her. I am much afraid it is best to obey the established laws than to live in mere safety to the end of one's life. (*Creon means that the laws established by the gods—which required the burial of the dead—ought to be obeyed even if one thus failed to round out one's life in peace and safety.*)

*Creon, attended by his escort, rushes off.*



*The old gentlemen of Thebes, the senators, that is to say, in council, are now served with liquid refreshments. As each old man takes his cup of wine he makes some appropriate observation on the subject of Dionysos or Bacchus, god of the grape juice. Doctor Dryasdust, that is, the pedantic scholar, tells us that the members of the Chorus are really singing an ode or "worshipping," but this is a view of the subject that rests upon a religious and operatic conception of Greek tragedy, a theory that does no harm if we do not accept it as established historical fact.*

*Chorus. Oh, many named! Delight of the Theban bride (that is, drink served at weddings) and offspring of loud roaring Jove, you who invest bright Italy (the vine grew everywhere there) and mingle in the Eleusinian throngs, welcome! (Drinks.)*

*Oh, Bacchus, dwelling in your mother city Thebes, and by Ismene's waters (a famous stream) on ground in which the dread dragon's teeth burst into bloom! (Drinks.)*

*Above the pair of hills whereon the fires of the torch-bearers go, Bacchus has been seen amid the nymphs of Corycia, Bacchantes themselves along the banks of the Castalian springs. (Drinks.)*

*From the Nysan slopes (mount in Euboea) you come to us, from where the ivy creeps and from the lands where many grapes cluster as they are hymned in words that shall be heavenly while you scan the Theban furrows. (Drinks.)*

*This is the town honored by thee above all*

others for the sake of your thunder-smitten mother. (*An allusion to the mother of Bacchus, who bore him amid the lightnings to Jove, she being a Theban maid.*)

And now, when all the city languishes in the clutches of a dread disease, come with benign feet over the slopes of Parnassus and across the resounding waters. (*They drink.*)

Oh, breathing fire as you lead the dance of the stars, listening for the nightly songs, (*Or, Oh, leader of the fire-breathing stars and master of the voices of the night, you child of Jove, appear!* (*This allusion to the revels of the Bacchantes under the moon is followed by a dance in which all do not join.*)

Come, oh sovereign, with your attendant Bacchantes, they who dance wildly all the night, give honor to those who cry aloud the name of Iacchus! (*The allusion to the Bacchic cry is rounded out with a dance and drinks.*)

*The revels of the old gentlemen are interrupted by the hurried arrival of a messenger. He is obviously a country-bred youth, yet cultured and refined in aspect and clad in bright scarlet tunic over which he has a white folding cloak. His feet are sandalled. He carries his helmet in his hand.*

*Messenger.* Citizens of Thebes, and dwellers in the house of Amphion (*he built a wall around Thebes*) there is no stage of a man's life that ever I would deem praiseworthy or censurable. Luck it is that sets him up and luck throws down not only the fortunate but the unfortunate as well. There is no foretelling what in the life of men is fixed and de-

terminated. Creon was enviable, or so it seemed to me once for he had saved this Theban land from its foes and he had received the sole sovereignty and well he swayed it, flourishing as the well born father of a princely line. Now all is in ruin. When their delights betray men I no longer think of them as living but rather as a corpse that goes on breathing. Let there be riches in your home, great riches, if you like, and live on as the ruler of the scheme of things below. Yet if there be no cause of delight in it all, I would not esteem that state more than the shadow of a vapor so far as yielding satisfaction goes.

*Chorus.* And what news of the woes of our princess have you come here to tell us?

*Messenger.* They die. The living are guilty of their death.

*Chorus.* Who were the slayers? Who were victims? Tell us.

*Messenger.* Haemon is dead. He was slain by his own hand.

*Chorus* (*incredulous, they ask for confirmation.*) Do you mean by his own hand or by his father's?

*Messenger.* He slew himself, enraged against his father for a murder.

*Chorus.* Oh, seer! how well you prophesied!

*Messenger.* The thing passed off like this—for you must consider the rest. (*His words are broken off by agitation within the palace.*)

*Chorus.* But I behold the unfortunate Eurydice, wife of Creon, and she comes out of the palace door either because she has heard of her son's fate or for some cause.

*The doors of the women's wing of the palace have by this time opened and three maids appear in the folds of their brown cloaks and with arms bared. Next appears Eurydice, a beautiful middle-aged woman with hair turning gray. She wears a bright yellow robe, reaching to her feet, and gold-threaded sandals. Her head is bare. She carries a vessel from which pours a cloud of incense. A young girl carries a lighted taper at the side of Eurydice. Eurydice herself advances to the edge of the steps leading down to the garden level.*

*Eurydice.* Citizens all, I overheard words as I was walking to the outer door to get to the altar of Pallas and there offer her my prayers. Just as I was lifting the bars of the unbolted gate, my ears were assailed by the voice of homely grief. I was overcome with anxiety and I fell back into the arms of my maids for I was sore stricken by the sounds. But whatever the words were, tell them to me at once. I can listen, not being without my knowledge of sorrow and evils.

*Messenger.* I, dear madam, for I was an eye witness, will leave no word of all the truth untold. Why should I extenuate anything when in the end all that is falsified will become plain? Let the truth only be told always. I was walking with your husband as his guide across the lofty plain where lay the remains of Polynices, mutilated by the dogs, with none to take compassion. And we pacified Pluto and the sepulchral hands of the triple goddess we rendered propitious with our entreaties. (*Hecate haunted cross roads and was supposed*

to make trouble for those who ignored her presence.) We performed the sacred ablutions of the corpse, bathing what was left of it with lustral waters and with the branches we tore from the trees by the side of the road we made a pyre funereal. Next we reared a mound of the native soil. At last we sought the stony bridal bed of the maid, entering that hollowed nuptial chamber of the bride of Hades. All at once someone from afar heard a shriek issuing from the weird tomb and signalled the fact to his master Creon, who was approaching. A dire presentiment at the sound of that cry overwhelmed him as he drew nearer and nearer and with a wail of woe he spoke his anguish. "Wretch that I am!" he cried. "Am I a seer indeed? Do I now travel the direst of all the ways I ever went. The voice of my son reaches me. Go! my grooms, hurry up and when you are beside the tomb force your way through the entrance, assure yourselves whether it is the voice of my son Haemon issuing through the gap in the stones or whether I am deluded by the gods." Moved by his entreaties and the cries of his grief, we went and searched.

*Eurydice listens transfixed and her maidens support her on all sides as the Messenger proceeds with his narrative.*

In the last corner of the tomb we came to we saw her hanging by the neck, pendent from a hempen cord finely woven. He with his arms around her waist was bewailing the marriage that was frustrated by the deed of a father and mourning his own wretched passion. When he (*Creon*) saw him (*Haemon*) he groaned and

rushed forward and called aloud in anguish once again. "What are you doing here, my son? Oh, wretched youth, what deed is yours? What is your plan? Are you mad in your grief? Come out, my son, I implore you." But with wild looks in his eyes the youth glared and spat in the face of his father and saying nothing, drew forth his two-edged sword. His father rushed in panic and the weapon missed its mark. Then the miserable youth in fury against himself, fell upon his sword and drove it half through his ribs. Then, while yet he breathed and had his senses, he strained the maiden to his heart. Even while he breathed his last, he tinged her white cheek with the dripping of his own blood stream. He lies now a corpse beside a corpse and he has received his bridal bliss in the abodes of Hades. He has shown men that lack of judgment is the greatest evil that befalls a mortal. (*In complete silence, Eurydice is borne within by her attendants.*)

*Chorus.* What does that suggest to you? The lady has turned back before she has spoken a word, good or bad.

*Messenger.* I am overwhelmed myself. I comfort myself with hopes that she will not deem it proper to afford her grief for her son an echo in the city but within her own home and beneath her own roof she will bewail her sorrow with her maidens alone. She is not without experience to such an extent as to go wrong.

*Chorus.* I don't know. To me this unnatural silence seems suggestive no less than would loud lament in vain.

*Messenger.* Well, I will go inside lest she keep within the secrecy of her soul some purpose that is hidden. You advise well. An extreme silence is ominous. (*He enters the palace by the servant's door.*)

*There is a sudden disturbance along the road that leads forth into the country. A motley procession is seen and the body of Haemon is borne in on a stretcher.*

*Chorus.* And here comes the king himself (*Creon is seen winding up the procession*) bringing a gloomy trophy with his own hands, if one may be permitted to say so, not the curse hurled by another but the dread deed of himself.

*Creon.* Ah! (*He drops on his knees beside the corpse.*) The woes of men are born of madness—sins that ever lead to doom and death. You see before you the one who slew and the one who perished—both of a breed. Oh, for my own vain counsels! Oh, my son! In youth you went the way of destiny to destruction. You have perished not through your own folly but by mine.

*Chorus.* You seem to see the right when it is too late.

*Creon.* Oh, I have dreadful things to learn. Some god put it into my head to do what I did. Some deity struck me mad and lured me into ways of woe and wickedness. My joy is trampled under foot—oh! The vain toils and troubles of men!

*The Messenger emerges from the palace.*

*Messenger.* Oh, sir, you have your hands full already with the woes you bring here and

yet soon within this palace will you come to behold evils no less terrible.

*Creon.* And what evil is to be worse than the evil we know now?

*Messenger.* Your wife is dead too, the mother of this dead boy, unfortunate one that she is! She died from blows she dealt herself just now.

*Creon.* Oh, too accessible port of Hades, why do you yawn for me? Oh, you bringer of evil tidings, what a message is yours! Ah! I was a man done to death already and yet see what you have done besides! What do you say, oh son? Have you no new message for me? Alas! Slaughter is heaped upon doom and the death of a wife is added to the woes I have.

*Chorus.* The spectacle is here for you to behold. It is no longer hidden.

*The doors of the palace are opened and the body of Eurydice is seen on a bier covered with flowers, while her maidens stand about and weep. Music within.*

*Creon.* Ha! Now I see a second grief, wretched man! What curse, what doom will yet be heaped upon me? I have just embraced my son and here I have another dead body to look at. Oh, unhappy mother and unhappy son!

*Messenger.* It was upon the altar there within that, in her grief and desolation, with one blow, she pierced her heart, stabbing herself by means of a keen blade and then shut her eyes so dark in death. A little while before she wept for the hapless taking off of



Megareus (*a Theban warrior who died heroically at one of the city's famous seven gates*) and next her tears flowed for that other son (*Megareus and Haemon were brothers*) whom we see here and last of all she breathed her imprecations upon you, the slayer of the children.

*Creon.* Ah! I am filled with horror. Who will slay me with his double-edged sword? I am under a doom and overwhelmed by its direness.

*Messenger.* More than once in her agony she whose dead body lies there scored you as the slayer of this son and that other one.

*Creon.* In what way did she do violence to herself?

*Messenger.* She struck herself to the vitals with her own hand the moment she heard of the terrible torment of her son.

*Creon.* Upon no other mortal can this train of cause and consequence be fastened. I, I, did the murder, man of woe am I! Let me confess it. Ye servants, lead me away as quickly as you can, lead me away for I am as good as done for.

*Chorus.* You advise to advantage—if there be any advantage in evils. The woes before our feet are worst when they are swiftest.

*Creon.* Let it come—let it come—it appears as a boon amid my woes, that last day I have to live will be my best! Let it come—let it come—that never may I behold another morning!

*Chorus.* Those are things to come. What

lies at hand must now be done. Take care of what you must take care of.

*Creon.* But I am praying for what I love most of all.

*Chorus.* Pray for nothing now. The thing that is inevitable—to this woe there is no alternative for mortals.

*Creon.* Take the helpless man away! I, oh my son, slew you, but not by design, and her, too—oh, what a wretch am I! I have nothing to look to more nor a place in which to find rest. All is evil that my hands have wrought and there (*he points to the dead*) upon my head a doom is heaped that is not to be borne. (*He is led within.*)

*Chorus.* First in well-being comes good judgment. The things that pertain to the gods must not be polluted ever. Mighty words bring mighty woes upon those who boast and teach the experienced what to think. (*Or, instruct the aged in wisdom.*)



